

Destination:

Bloomfield to Kennett The Missouri Bootheel

Each issue, the *Pathways* staff chooses a notable locale – a place worth visiting – and explores the paths that lead to it, spotlighting attractions, points of interest, oddities and other items of note along the way.

After all, getting there is half the adventure.

Once nothing much more than swamps, southeast Missouri is now home to thriving businesses, growing residential areas and beautiful scenery. The perfect route to view the bustling towns of southeast Missouri and experience all that they have to offer is Route 25 and Route 412 – a scenic byway and an important transportation improvement promising progress.

Stars and Stripes Forever

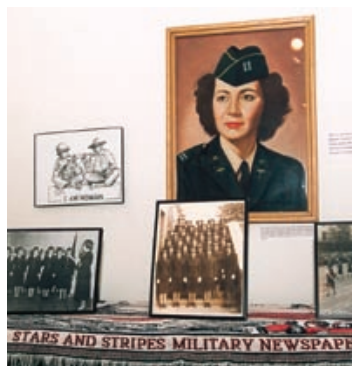
We begin our journey in Bloomfield where a trip to the Stars and Stripes Museum and Library is a requirement. The museum offers a plethora of history and entertainment, but it's probably not what you think. This tourist attraction is not paying homage to the United States flag, but to the military newspaper Stars and Stripes.

The daily newspaper of the U.S. Armed Forces actually was born in Bloomfield, Mo., in 1861. A group of 10 Illinois Union soldiers discovered the abandoned offices of the Bloomfield Herald newspaper and published the first *Stars and Stripes*, named after Old Glory herself. The museum has one of the original editions of the 1861 paper on display.

The museum contains not only editions of the newspaper, but also displays of items from each of the nation's wars and conflicts. Many

former Stars and Stripes employees have donated letters, back issues of the newspaper and other war-related items for display.

"If you have any link with the military, I think you would enjoy seeing what we have on display," says Patty Lands, assistant director of the museum.



By Tonya Wells

"We have items from the Civil War to current events."

A display from the latest American conflict, the war in Iraq, includes an Iraqi flag signed by the American unit that found it. Lands says museum visitors range from

veterans, families and friends of veterans to school children. The summer months saw an increase in visitors from 15 to 53 per day.

"I enjoy the school fieldtrips the most," Lands says. "We let the kids try on the military uniforms and take their pictures. They have a lot of fun playing in the uniforms and seeing the differences from each time period."

A Living Museum

After learning about the history of our armed forces newspaper, don't fast forward through time just yet. A southward journey along Route 25 will bring you to Dexter and more historical activities.

The most notable is the Heritage House, Dexter's oldest standing house. The home was built in 1876 by the Cryts family and is available for tours by appointment. It survived through the years and was purchased by the Dexter National Bank in 1976 for use in the expansion of a parking lot. The bank's board of directors decided to donate



PHOTOS BY GARY REINHART



The walk to the front door



Heritage House Interior



Kathy Newell

the home to the city. The house was relocated to its present location and became known as the Heritage House, symbolizing the city's history.

The house underwent a renovation to more closely resemble its original design. Civic organizations, high school classes, scout troops and community members donated hours to restoring the home. The house is completely furnished and decorated with donations by Dexter residents.

"The community has been so good to support us," says Kathy Newell of the Heritage Association. "We have had a lot of items and time donated."

The Heritage Association is made up of 10 people who maintain the house, add to it and lead tours. Newell got involved with the organization about six years ago.

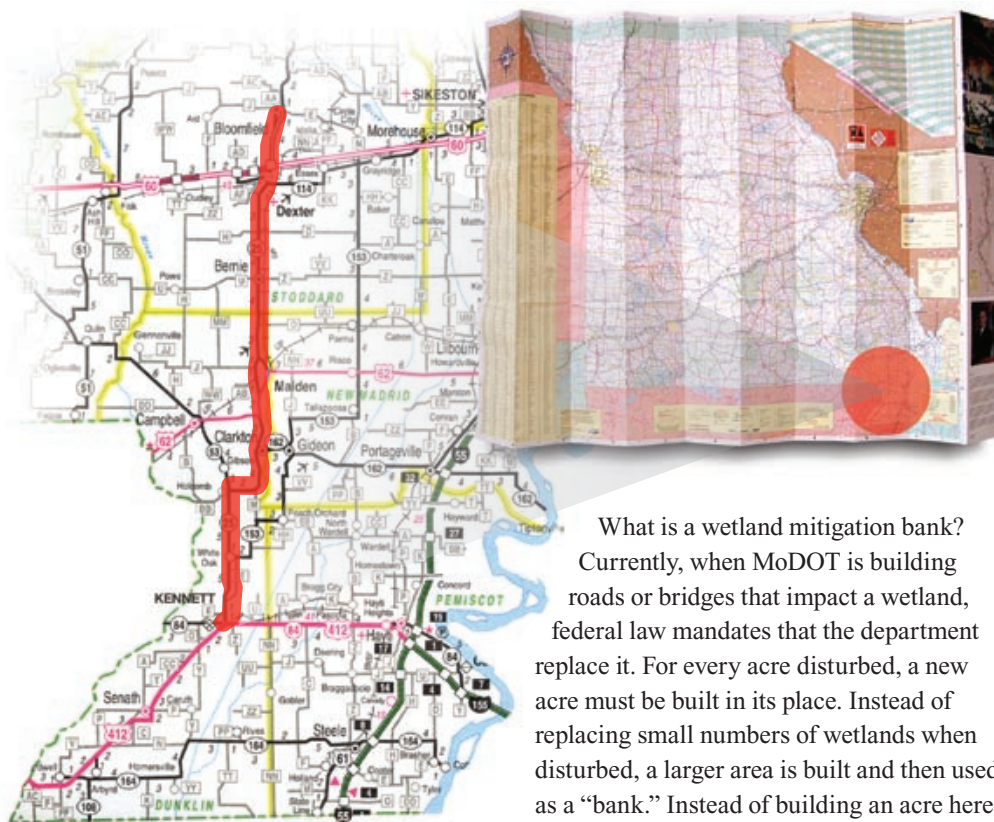
"We had just moved here," she says. "I love antiques and I came on a tour of the house and just asked about it. I got involved then and have been ever since."

Her involvement has become not just something that she enjoys, but a learning experience about her new hometown.

"I think the very best part is the tours on Pioneer Day. A lot of people are exposed to the house and what it was like to live in those days. The house is really a living museum," she says.

Banking on Missouri Wetlands

Nature lovers will want to take a visit to Otter Slough, a 4,866-acre conservation area near Dexter. The wetland is managed primarily for waterfowl, mink, otter, herons, egrets and other shore birds.



For visitors, the area offers hunting, fishing, camping, nature trails, canoeing and many opportunities for photography.

"Some of the best photos and sites for photos are in inclement weather," says Missouri Department of Conservation Community Outreach Specialist Phil Helfrich. "At those moments, nature reveals itself in different and interesting ways."

The Missouri Department of Transportation dedicated a 140-acre wetland mitigation bank near Otter Slough last fall. It was the state's first completed wetland mitigation bank.

What is a wetland mitigation bank? Currently, when MoDOT is building roads or bridges that impact a wetland, federal law mandates that the department replace it. For every acre disturbed, a new acre must be built in its place. Instead of replacing small numbers of wetlands when disturbed, a larger area is built and then used as a "bank." Instead of building an acre here and there along a project, those impacted acres can simply be deducted from the bank.

"In addition to helping projects move along faster, a mitigation bank also saves tax





Otter Slough

dollars,” said MoDOT Southeast District Engineer Scott Meyer. “It could cost the department \$15,000-20,000 an acre to buy and develop a wetland on the project site. Creating a larger bank reduces the cost to approximately \$3,000 an acre.”

Leaving Dexter and Stoddard County behind we travel to Malden in Dunklin County. Dunklin County’s northern part is bisected by Crowley’s Ridge, formed 15,000 years ago as the bank of the Mississippi River. The ridge was used as a military road in the Civil War by both sides. Today, it is home to the Crowley’s Ridge Scenic Byway, a 42-mile route that begins at the Dunklin/Stoddard County line and runs on Route 25 south to Malden.

The route is Missouri’s second scenic byway that offers travelers access to Missouri’s scenery, cultural or historical features and preserves and improves the scenic value of a route. Scenic byways steer motorists to areas of natural beauty where views include state and local parks or other public lands, historic, recreational or archaeological areas (see the related Scenic Byways stories on page 3).

Another stop along the way is the Malden Historical Museum. The museum gives visitors the chance to step back in time both locally and globally. One of its most popular exhibits is the model portrayal of the drainage of the swamplands of southeast Missouri by the Little River Drainage District.

The museum also offers displays from both World Wars as well as the Korean War. For more worldly knowledge, you can check out the Egyptian antiquities on display dating back to 2000 B.C.

A Place for the Kids

The Bootheel Youth Museum helps us trade in the old for the young along our journey. Learning gets a different kind of treatment at the Bootheel Youth Museum. The museum offers programs, workshops and tours of its 10,000-square-foot exhibit hall and 180-seat children’s theater.

Once inside, kids discover fun and learning in math, science, natural resources and the arts. The exhibits allow children to stand inside a bubble, freeze their shadow on a wall, whisper and it be heard 40 feet across a crowded room and make music on sewer pipes.

“My favorite was sliding down the pole in the fire station, but the video games in front of the green wall were cool too,” said 4-year-old Grant Wilson after his preschool visited the museum.

The museum was started in 1990 by a group of civic leaders, college officials and interested citizens. The learning environment has been host to more than 130,000 visitors representing 11 foreign countries, 40 states and a multitude of southeast Missouri school children.

“I love to watch the kids’ eyes light up when they enter,” says Gallery Attendant Patti

Phelps. “They’re so in awe of everything. It’s different every day.”

Kennett is the next stop on our journey and your first stop there should be the Kennett Chamber of Commerce where you can get all the information needed on area attractions, places to eat and finding your way while there. After that, be sure to visit a piece of Kennett history at the Dunklin County Museum.

Located on the Kennett Square in what was once the city hall, the museum is on the National Register of Historic Places. Visitors can view Native American artifacts, wildlife displays and the history of the Missouri Bootheel. The museum also houses Kennett’s first jail.

Widening the Road to Opportunity

Kennett is located on Route 412, an important roadway in southeast Missouri, crossing the Bootheel. The route is currently undergo-



ing a \$67 million upgrade to four lanes – far from where it began.

The original road from the Arkansas state line to Hayti, Routes 84 and 25, was built in the 1920s using money from a \$60 million bond issue after passage of Missouri's Centennial Road Law. The remaining six miles from Hayti to Caruthersville were completed in the early 1930s.

Back then, the road was 30-feet wide with two 9-foot wide lanes and 6-foot shoulders.

Once the Route 412 improvements are completed, the road will be four lanes, each lane 12-foot wide with 10-foot shoulders. While the local communities are excited about the



An antique cash register on display at the Dunklin County Museum

upgrade and the potential economical benefits it will bring, their feelings aren't that different from those of Kennett residents in the 1920s.

"When the road was being built, one of the local leaders, C.C. Redman, knew how important it would be for Kennett," says Dunklin County Museum Director Sandy Brown. "He wanted the route not just in Dunklin County but knew that extending it to Pemiscot County would also bring trade to Kennett."

The Little River Drainage District was essential in creating the roads. Brown says only when the Floodway Ditches were built, was building the road from Kennett to Hayti possible.



Bootheel Youth Museum

After draining the area, water was still a challenge. Crossing the major rivers on each side of the Bootheel became a test. Route 84 crossed the St. Francis River with a wooden bridge. Motorists used ferries from Caruthersville to cross the Mississippi River into Tennessee. Today, a four-lane bridge crosses into Tennessee near Caruthersville and work is proceeding on a four-lane bridge to cross into Arkansas.

The current Route 412 upgrade is expected to be completed in 2005. And, Chamber President Jan McElwrath says she couldn't be happier.

"These improvements are a vital process to the increased economic opportunities for our area and it has been very heartening to watch the progress along Route 412," she says.

Route 412 can also deliver a wide variety of venues for nature lovers. Two opportunities for fishing, hunting and wildlife watching are available near Kennett.

The first is the Ben Cash Conservation Area, a 1,300-acre wildlife area on the St. Francis River. The second is the Little River Conservation Area and Jerry Paul Combs Lake, which offer a 200-acre fishing lake with boat ramp. The wetlands area and lake offer wintering to many species of ducks, hawks and other birds.

"Southeast Missouri is the most biologically diverse area in the state. There are all kinds of things to see," says Helfrich.

The Missouri Bootheel is rich in cultural and natural opportunities for the traveler. It is a place where Missouri history still lives and breathes, and a place where a day's drive can provide a lifetime of memories.

Tonya Wells is an outreach specialist in MoDOT's Southeast District.

Until next time, may your destinations be exciting and the journeys to them eye-opening. ■



Even grain bins can become roadside attractions